

FRENCH INDO-CHINA

cult of the past. France has welded five disparate countries into a political and economic unit which would never have been achieved independently. Whether or not Annamite nationalism could be so expanded and modified as to take in incipient Laotian and Cambodian national consciousness is problematical, and at present seems very unlikely. The Annamites have caught fire from the West politically and economically, far more than they have culturally.

It is idle speculation to debate whether or not the Annamites were better off spiritually before the French conquest. Sooner or later they would have been forcibly drawn into the modern world, and in the sense that it was inevitable, French colonization is beyond good and evil. When and if Indo-China emerges as a real nation, it will bear upon it the imprint of French culture—not in the pure form imagined by the assimilationists—but in a hybrid version, whose modifications were made by its transplantation to an exotic setting. French institutions themselves have not been sufficiently affected by contact with Annamite culture to change, except in a subtle evolution of viewpoint on the part of colonials resident in the colony. Save in the economic sphere the balance sheet of French Indo-China up to now has registered on both sides more destructive than constructive change.

